

Revue québécoise de droit international
Quebec Journal of International Law
Revista quebequense de derecho internacional



BERTRAND BADIE, *HUMILIATION IN INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS: A PATHOLOGY OF CONTEMPORARY INTERNATIONAL SYSTEMS*, OXFORD, UK, HART PUBLISHING, 2017

Sabrina Tremblay-Huet

Volume 31, Number 1, 2018

URI: <https://id.erudit.org/iderudit/1065041ar>

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.7202/1065041ar>

[See table of contents](#)

Publisher(s)

Société québécoise de droit international

ISSN

0828-9999 (print)

2561-6994 (digital)

[Explore this journal](#)

Cite this review

Tremblay-Huet, S. (2018). Review of [BERTRAND BADIE, *HUMILIATION IN INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS: A PATHOLOGY OF CONTEMPORARY INTERNATIONAL SYSTEMS*, OXFORD, UK, HART PUBLISHING, 2017]. *Revue québécoise de droit international / Quebec Journal of International Law / Revista quebequense de derecho internacional*, 31(1), 325–328.
<https://doi.org/10.7202/1065041ar>

BERTRAND BADIE, *HUMILIATION IN INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS: A PATHOLOGY OF CONTEMPORARY INTERNATIONAL SYSTEMS*, OXFORD, UK, HART PUBLISHING, 2017

*Sabrina Tremblay-Huet**

Perhaps prophesizing the current pressing need to theorize humiliation in international relations, Bertrand Badie published in 2014 *Le temps des humiliés. Pathologie des relations internationales*.¹ It was translated by Jeff Lewis and later published in 2017, in Hart Publishing's *French Studies in International Law* collection under the title *Humiliation in International Relations: A Pathology of Contemporary International Systems*. Badie is a political science professor at Sciences Po, in Paris. He specializes in sociology and international relations theory, comparative politics, multilateralism, international public opinion, the evolution of the state and of sovereignty in international relations, and political culture.²

Although it is put forward in the front flap summary that social psychology and the French sociological tradition are mobilized in this volume, a historical approach also takes center stage. This volume can account for one of the rare contributions to the fields of emotions and international law³ and international relations,⁴ or psychology and international law and international relations.⁵

The author's thesis is that "in the diversity of its appearances humiliation has become a standard parameter of international relations."⁶ He seeks to show how humiliation is generated in an international system, and how it is reacted to.⁷ What then, is international humiliation? For Badie, it is constituted of "any authoritarian assignment of a status that is inferior to the desired status, in a manner that does not conform to defined norms."⁸ It is not to be confused with shame or trauma, shame being "only a feeling" and trauma being the impact violence can have.⁹

* Lecturer and doctoral candidate, Faculty of Law, University of Sherbrooke.

¹ Bertrand Badie, *Le temps des humiliés : Pathologie des relations internationales* (Paris: Odile Jacob, 2014).

² Bertrand Badie, *SciencesPo École doctorale*, online : SciencesPo <<http://www.sciencespo.fr/ceri/fr/cerispire-user/7198/1523>>.

³ See e.g. Peter H Huang, "International Environmental Law and Emotional Rational Choice" (2002) 31 *J Leg Stud* 237.

⁴ See e.g. Yohan Arrifin, Jean-Marc Coicaud & Vesselin Popovski, eds, *Emotions in International Politics: Beyond Mainstream International Relations* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2017) (Chapter 8 is dedicated to "Emotions and International Law").

⁵ See e.g. Joshua D Kertzer & Dustin Tingley, "Political Psychology in International Relations: Beyond the Paradigms" (2018) 21 *Ann Rev Pol Sci* 1.

⁶ Bertrand Badie, *Humiliation in International Relations: A Pathology of Contemporary International Systems* (Oxford: Hart Publishing, 2017) at 5 [Badie, *Humiliation*].

⁷ *Ibid* at 7.

⁸ *Ibid* at 5.

⁹ *Ibid* at 6.

The downward shift in status in Badie's description of international humiliation is "in complete contradiction to the norms and values upon which international life is based."¹⁰ As such, Badie confronts the main pillar on which international law and international relations are built: sovereignty. Indeed, the social construction of sovereignty requires the belief and practice that all states are equal. However, and this is by no means surprising for international relations scholars, unequal power relations between states confront this aspiration heads on, on a daily basis.

Badie's demonstration is divided into three parts: "Humiliation in the History of International Relations: The Discovery of a New Form of Social Pathology"; "An International System Fed by Humiliation"; and "The Dangerous Repercussions that Follow Humiliation: Towards an Anti-System?" He concludes with thoughts on the future of humiliation in international relations. Badie proposes that this is an effect of this system of international relations, characterized by the socialization of international life and globalization.¹¹ In response to globalization, he argues that we must rethink the status of states,¹² as until then, "humiliation remains the primary mark of the defeat of all conservatism [and] testifies to the difficulty in conceiving of otherness in the post-Westphalian world."¹³

In Part one, Badie uses a historical demonstration to show that humiliation is linked to modern international relations, "new forms of humiliation [giving] rise to new forms of diplomacy."¹⁴ Interestingly, he argues that the "international arena is becoming more social than political,"¹⁵ the place of social movements and populations' participation growing in international relations, the latter which is not restricted to international diplomacy anymore. The social aspect of sovereignty is also underlined; it indeed only exists if it is recognized by the other actors in one's world.¹⁶ Aside from mainly historical arguments, this Part also weaves in introductions to international relations theory, such as a brief presentation of the ideas of the realists Hobbes, Schmitt and Clausewitz. The sum of Badie's historical demonstration is that three factors produced "diplomacies of humiliation": just war, encounter with the social, and rise of the other (or, as I would write it, the "Other").¹⁷ From this, he constructs a typology of humiliation.¹⁸ He identifies four categories of types of humiliation: humiliation by lowering of status; humiliation through denial of equality; humiliation by relegation; and humiliation by stigmatization. These can lead to specific types of reactive models of diplomacy: revanchist diplomacy; sovereigntism diplomacy; contestation diplomacy; and deviance diplomacy.

¹⁰ *Ibid* at 5.

¹¹ *Ibid* at 167.

¹² *Ibid* at 168.

¹³ *Ibid* at 169.

¹⁴ *Ibid* at 10.

¹⁵ *Ibid* at 11.

¹⁶ *Ibid* at 18.

¹⁷ *Ibid* at ch 2.

¹⁸ *Ibid* at ch 3.

In Part two, Badie demonstrates the inevitability of humiliation in international relations through his exploration of the forms of inequality embodied by, constructed by, reproduced by, our current international system. These are: constitutive inequality;¹⁹ structural inequality;²⁰ and functional inequality.²¹ As concerns constitutive inequality, Badie links today's unequal effects of globalization to the world's colonial past. It is interesting to see the ravages of colonialism present in today's international system being included in a work that does not purport itself to be in the field of "critical theory." The author points out that while the colonial project "established a mode of domination over people founded on a perceived inequality,"²² the modern international system is supposedly "based on the sovereign equality of States."²³ However, a continuity of the colonial logic of humiliation can be observed nowadays in what many term "recolonization."²⁴ In terms of structural inequality, here too the aftermath of colonialism can be felt. Badie identifies two "major ruptures" leading to the structural inequality of the modern international system. Firstly, he points to the creation of the United Nations and its five permanent members with veto powers, in the form of "multilateralism based on a strange compromise."²⁵ The second rupture is the Cold War, "which gave power more authority than it should ever have."²⁶ Lastly, functional inequality refers to the exclusion from international governance in practice. The author argues that its most visible symptoms are what he calls "minilateralism"; oligarchic pressure; and diplomatic paternalism. "Minilateralism" is the result of the "desired shrinkage" of multilateralism;²⁷ oligarchic pressure was what happened instead of a greater inclusion as promised by the idea of globalization;²⁸ and diplomatic paternalism characterizes the current "formal instruments of diplomacy, in the name of a presumed superiority."²⁹

In Part three, Badie asks if we are headed for an "anti-system."³⁰ Its deployment can be observed at three levels: that of societies themselves;³¹ that of diplomacies;³² and that of conflict,³³ not to be confused with wars between States in the form they took in the past. "The Mediating Role of Societies"³⁴ accounts for the emergence of non-state actors on the international scene, aside from the obvious role that multinational companies have gained in the process. As concerns "anti-system diplomacies," the author groups them in two categories: oppositional diplomacies and

¹⁹ *Ibid* at ch 4.

²⁰ *Ibid* at ch 5.

²¹ *Ibid* at ch 6.

²² *Ibid* at 69.

²³ *Ibid*.

²⁴ *Ibid* at 85.

²⁵ *Ibid* at 87.

²⁶ *Ibid*.

²⁷ *Ibid* at 105.

²⁸ *Ibid* at 110.

²⁹ *Ibid* at 116.

³⁰ *Ibid* at 121.

³¹ *Ibid* at ch 7.

³² *Ibid* at ch 8.

³³ *Ibid* at ch 9.

³⁴ *Ibid* at 123.

diplomacies of deviance. This trend can only be put to an end, or be minimally toned down, he argues, by “a policy of international social integration.”³⁵ Finally, Badie conceptualizes modern violence as “social,” rather than exceptional and of an “ordered nature.”³⁶ The modern world would see the emergence of an “extreme decentralization of the violence that plagues it,” moving further away from Clausewitz’s direct war.³⁷ It would also be witness to “a massive invasion of emotion [that] profoundly changes the situation.”³⁸ As a result of this, the author warns against rising forms of racism, Islamophobia, and the fear of the “other”³⁹ (here again, I would prefer “Other,” as rather than a noun characterizing a true phenomenon, we are referring to a social construction we’ve theoretically named the “Other”).

Considering that this book was published in the *French Studies in International Law* collection, and even if Badie does mention that “humiliation comes equipped with laws, treaties and principles,”⁴⁰ closer explicit linkages to international law as an instrument of humiliation would have been relevant. However, *Humiliation in International Relations: A Pathology of Contemporary International Systems* does participate in the construction of our understanding of international law as international politics, one not possible without the other; “law is politics,”⁴¹ as the Critical Legal Studies approach demonstrated convincingly.

This volume is an important tool for interpreting the current world of international relations, which has many observers shaking their heads in disbelief or despair, as must be a common thread amongst observers of all decades. It is also an ode to the richness of interdisciplinary interpretations of the international world; the incorporation of social psychology and sociology are refreshing, as most international relations theorists are already convinced, it would seem, by the contribution of history as a discipline to international relations studies. Finally, “humiliation” as a named phenomenon of international relations, as so thoroughly presented and analyzed in this volume in masterful retrospective and prospective manners, stands the chance of becoming a word associated with the discipline in the same way as “power” did. Hopefully, one day, humanity will learn from this simple observation, and consequently this lesson: “Humiliation never stops being reborn under the influence of the errors it inspires.”⁴²

³⁵ *Ibid* at 151.

³⁶ *Ibid* at 153.

³⁷ *Ibid* at 160.

³⁸ *Ibid* at 165.

³⁹ *Ibid*.

⁴⁰ *Ibid* at 2.

⁴¹ “Critical Legal Theory”, in *Wex*, by Legal Information Institute, online: LII <https://www.law.cornell.edu/wex/critical_legal_theory>.

⁴² Badie, *Humiliation*, *supra* note 6 at 165.